

# JANUARY 2019 NEWSLETTER

## CHANNEL CROSSINGS

The news of people taking the dangerous crossing over the English Channel hit the headlines recently. Many people were taken aback at the attitude taken by the Home Secretary, and our Lib Dem Parliamentary team spoke up.

- **Ed Davey** said: *"The Home Secretary's comments about refugees crossing the Channel show that the Tories' nasty, hostile environment is alive and well. Many of these people have fled war in Syria or persecution in Iran. For the Home Secretary to suggest – on the basis of no evidence whatsoever – that they are not 'genuine' asylum seekers is completely unacceptable. For the Government to summarily deny their claims would be unlawful and inhumane. The Liberal Democrats demand better."*
- In the Lords debate on channel crossings, **Shas Sheehan** [rightly challenged](#) the Minister's claim because there is no evidence that migrants "choose" to cross. She pointed out that only a desperate situation will push them away, not alleged "pull" factors.
- **Sally Hamwee**, in the same debate on channel crossings, [pointed out](#) that *"safe and legal routes to sanctuary" are needed, not an invented new phrase "safe and controlled"*. In any case, all asylum claims should be properly assessed, not prejudged.
- Also in the [same debate](#) on channel crossings, **Brian Paddick** asks if conditions in France for refugees are humane and just ?

The **Home Secretary** has [responded](#) by defining it as a 'major incident' and questioning whether those coming over are 'genuine asylum-seekers' given that they are coming from France. He added: *"If you do somehow make it to the UK, we will do everything we can to make sure that you are often not successful because we need to break that link, and to break that link means we can save more lives."*

Refugee Council has produced a Q&A on the situation available [here](#).

**Free Movement** have written an excellent blog, '[Are refugees obliged to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach?](#)', which concludes that there is no obligation on refugees to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, and that *"there is no known evidence to suggest a 'real' refugee actually does stay in the first safe country he or she reaches."*

This informative and evidence based [article](#) by LD4SOS Council member, **Bradley Hillier-Smith** describes awful treatment by French police, and the reasons why people are fleeing.

Other responses include this in [The Tablet](#), and what Sarah Teather [says](#).

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) sums it up in their Oped on Channel Crossings: *"If anything has Come to Crisis Point it's the Language Used by our Home Secretary"*

## IMMIGRATION BILL

Asylum Matters tells us that the Government has published the long-awaited white paper on immigration. Of particular relevance to asylum and refugee advocates will be Chapter 10, 'Protecting the Vulnerable,' which sets out the Government's ambitions for asylum and resettlement policy. Commitments include providing support to the most vulnerable through resettlement schemes beyond post-2020; securing an 'ambitious and well-funded English language strategy'; improving the quality and accuracy of decision-making to prioritise getting decisions right the first time; providing support to asylum-seekers who would otherwise be destitute; and exploring alternatives to detention. Of particular significance is the statement on the right to work for asylum-seekers, signalling the Government's willingness to engage with the Lift the Ban coalition on reform.

On refugee family reunion, the [Refugee Council has said](#), “Despite there being clear cross party support for changes to be made to current refugee family reunion rules, the Government continues to deprive child refugees of the right to grow up with their parents and siblings.”

**DETENTION.** An excellent [briefing from Detention Forum](#) here on the need for a “Time for a Time Limit”, which says quite a bit about the need for the time limit to apply to all immigration detainees, including those with a criminal conviction. This may become an issue during the Immigration Bill debate starting on Monday. Liberal Democrats are clear that the time limit applies to all. There is also an interesting posting on the possible role of Immigration Bill in ending detention [here](#).

**ACCOMMODATION.** The Home Affairs Committee on Asylum Accommodation Contracts has published its report, ‘[Asylum Accommodation: Replacing COMPASS](#)’. We agree that there is a need for genuine partnership between the Home Office and Local Authorities, sharing information and plans, to enable much better preparation for asylum seekers locally.

The new contracts have now been awarded, and we are watching to ensure that the new 10 year housing contracts will be monitored more effectively than in the past, with more accountability and transparency in their work.

**PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIAN MINORITIES.** One of our Council members has had this [letter](#) published in The Guardian, in response to calls by the Foreign Secretary to protect Christian minorities in the world. The letter points out that there are many such persecuted people who have fled to this country. It goes on to say that we need to treat them much better, for instance by not putting them into indefinite detention and giving them the right to work.

**RIGHT TO WORK.** Liberal Democrats are supporting the campaign “**Lift The Ban**”. It has long been our policy, as [here](#). Christine Jardine [introduced a private members bill](#) in Parliament as part of the campaign.

**THE COST OF CITIZENSHIP FOR CHILDREN.** The Government is waiving the £65 it planned to charge EU residents for registration in the event of Brexit. In case you thought it was all good news, the Government will still charge children born here an outrageous £1013 to apply for Citizenship. You can read more in this [Citizens UK report](#), but it costs 10 times more than in other EU countries for this application to be made, and the Government makes over £600 profit on each application.

## **PROPOSED REPLACEMENT OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTRES (IDCS) AT HEATHROW**

A little publicised part of the consultation on the Heathrow expansion is that Colnbrook and Harmondsworth IDCs which are close to the airport will be closed - which is good - and replaced with one large IDC – which is not good. We understand that the overall number of detention places will remain the same but the space will increase by 25%.

The UK detains more people than any other European country. Lib Dem policy is that this cruel and unnecessary practice has to end. We want to see a massive reduction in the numbers of IDCs and the number of individuals detained; no one should be detained for more than 28 days and vulnerable people should never be detained. Instead of detaining people there should be investment in community alternatives to detention.

A range of groups are now getting together to campaign against the replacement of the IDCs. There is inevitably tension between the different campaign objectives. Many people believe that there should be no detention at all, and campaigning for a smaller, better-managed IDC only undermines that argument. There is also, of course, the wider campaign that opposes the 3<sup>rd</sup> runway at Heathrow – which many of us

campaigned against as part of the Richmond By-election. If, by some miracle, the expansion was halted, then presumably the two IDCs would stay as they are – and as long as those places are there they will be filled - often by people who should not be detained at all.

With some reluctance LD4SOS recognise that it may always be necessary to detain some individuals who have not been given permission to stay in the UK and are going to be removed. It would be less traumatic if they were detained near to the airport they were flying out of. There is, therefore, an argument for a small well managed short-term detention facility as part of the Heathrow expansion. The facility should be designed in such a way that it can accommodate women and families separately to single males, and provide comfortable and dignified surroundings. The short term holding facilities in Heathrow itself (subject of much criticism from the Independent Monitoring Board) should also be replaced appropriately.

There will be further consultation over the proposals for Heathrow including sites for the new replacement IDCs over the next six months. Those of us living in London and the areas surrounding Heathrow will have already received a leaflet inviting us to meetings to discuss the proposed plans. There will be a wider national consultation later on this year. We understand, however, that the Home Office has asked that the discussion about the IDCs takes place in closed meetings. This is currently being checked and, if so, whether it can be challenged.

Inevitably most of the attention will be focused on trying to stop the third runway and understanding the impact it will have on the different sites proposed. But we mustn't forget that the future shape of two of the major IDCs will also be decided, and we must seize the opportunity to campaign for a smaller and much improved facility. LD4SOS are trying to brief the key MPs/Peers/Councillors so that they are also aware of this issue. If you live in London or one of the surrounding areas do try and get along to the consultation meetings and raise the issue of IDCs (be really helpful to tell us what you are told) and also raise it with your MP or councillor.